

Title	Pushing the Limits of the Family on Turkish Television: Lost City, an alternative voice?
Type	Article
URL	https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/15247/
Date	2016
Citation	Emre Cetin, Berfin (2016) Pushing the Limits of the Family on Turkish Television: Lost City, an alternative voice? European Journal of Communication, 31 (6). ISSN 1460-3705
Creators	Emre Cetin, Berfin

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Pushing the Limits of the Family on Turkish Television: *Lost City*, an alternative voice?

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Abstract

This paper discusses the shift in the representation of the family through a case study of *Lost City* (2012-2013). The programme challenges the dominant representations of the family on Turkish television that are mostly framed by a particular neighbourhood culture and are characterized by organic solidarity. As outsiders in Turkish society, a prostitute, a Kurdish family, and a Black illegal immigrant challenge the unity of the Toptas family that has moved to Istanbul from the Black Sea region of Turkey and who are trying hard to survive against poverty and the ‘cosmopolitan culture’ of the city. The series problematizes the borders of the family as different members of the Toptas family develop new relationships extending the family to include the outsiders of Turkish society. Drawing on Turkish family dramas such as *Super Dad* (1993-1997), *Father’s Home* (1997-2002), *The Falling Leaves* (2005-2010) and *Lost City*, this paper examines the discursive shift in the representation of the family on Turkish television.

Keywords: family, Turkish television, television drama, representation, *Lost City*

Introduction

Turkish Radio and Television Law (1983) defines the appropriateness of what is broadcast according to various principles that include ‘the requirement of general morals, national traditions and spiritual values’ (Article 5/e). This particular code has been applied by the Radio and Television Supreme Council several times to censure inappropriate programmes

which it views as at odds with ‘the society’s national and moral values and the structure of the Turkish family’. The three main concepts of this key principle reveal the way in which the family, moral values and nationalism are considered complementary and need to be protected within the Turkish media culture. This paper focuses on the family dramas on Turkish television which hold particular importance, not only in terms of the gender politics of representation in general but also of the politics of media regulation in Turkey.

Family dramas have contributed a great deal to the making of television culture allowing ‘people to enter an imaginary social life, one that was shared not in the neighbourhood of bridge clubs and mahjong gatherings, but on the national networks’ of television broadcasting (Spiegel, 1992: 13). In this regard, it is important to address the shifts in the images of families on television that invite real families into ‘an imaginary social life’ constructed by a particular televisual discourse. This paper provides an overview of family representations in Turkish television dramas with a particular focus on the case of *Lost City* (*Kayip Sehir*, 2012-2013) which challenges the conventional representations of the family. Although it is difficult to easily classify family dramas, due to the variety of family life they portray, one can draw particular patterns which construct the narrative and representations of the family. Douglas (2003:162) notes that ‘examinations of the television family have tended to rely on content analysis’ (see Bryant, 1990), however such analyses are not able to highlight the broader picture, the various ways in which television represents, idealizes, and/or contests the conceptions of the family.

Firstly, in this paper, I discuss the extent to which television families matter, despite the fact that they are mainly ignored in contemporary television studies. Then, I argue that the dominant representations of family on Turkish television are ones that are mostly framed within a particular neighbourhood culture characterized by organic solidarity and that carry a depiction of fatherhood as the protector of the family. Lastly, I shall focus on *Lost City*, a

contemporary television drama in which the fatherless Toptas family ends up questioning the traditional borders of Turkish family structure.

Why do television families matter?

According to Taylor (1989: 65), television ‘has always spoken the language of family in both its themes and forms – the realist visual and verbal codes that one sees not only in the individual show but also in the highly recombinant and formulaic episodic series’. Although this seems to be challenged by the overwhelming popularity of lifestyle television which is characterized by an emphasis on the individual in the neoliberal era (Palmer, 2008; Morley, 2009), the family still occupies a central position, particularly in fictional programmes. Either by taking the discursive form of addressing the audience as members of family, or by treating the family as the representational unit in news or dramas, the concept of the family has a significant value for contemporary television culture. Nevertheless, despite this central position and the representational variety portrayed in the history of television, television families have not been a popular topic of academic scrutiny for more than two decades. As the “family” seems to have dropped off the agenda in contemporary cultural theory’ (Chambers, 2000: 195), so it has also been rendered almost invisible in contemporary television studies.

According to Valaskivi (2000: 310), we can call a serial a family drama if ‘it has a family at the centre of the narrative, and, second, supposes a family audience and/or addresses “family interests”’. In addition, some sort of a consensus between the producers and viewers that the serial is a family drama is needed (Valasviki, 2000). Analyzing the representations of the family on television is not only important in making sense of the cultural meanings of the family, but also because it provides a nexus in which the cultural understandings of social life in terms of class, gender, sexuality, youth, parental and generational relations and so on are located. In this vein, television families can help us to better understand the ways in which

social conflicts, agreements and collaborations that take place in the private realm are represented. In other words, '[t]he significance of popular portrayals of the family and the association between those portrayals and real family life derives, in part, from the significance of the family experience' (Douglas, 2003: 3). As Douglas (2003: 10) further argues 'the versions of the family seen on television may, for many, be in some respects more real and more informative about families in general than are those in their own neighborhoods'.

Studies of US television indicate that television families are primarily associated with tradition and framed by an adherence to particular social norms and values (Newcomb, 1974; Cantor, 1991). Olson and Douglas (1997: 409) note that television series focusing on family life almost doubled on US television during the four decades after 1950, 'with more than half of those shows in each decade falling into the situation comedy category'. This is to say the overwhelming majority of family depictions were in fictional comedy programmes. In contrast to the harmonious, integrated television families of the 1950s and 1960s, the depiction of families on television during the 1970s appeared as a forum in which social conflicts between different members were negotiated (Taylor, 1989: 65). While only appearing mainly in supporting roles during the 1970s, the following decade saw the introduction of Black families as central characters in popular shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *Charlie and Company* (Cummings, 1988: 80). Meanwhile, motherhood and marriage was central to the role of the female characters of television families during the 1970s and 1980s (Albada, 2000). These representations reinforce the idea 'that television predominantly presents a singular view of family' as traditional and happy consisting of white, nuclear, middle-class members (Albada, 2000: 81). In their cross-national analysis of Australia, Denmark, Hungary and Britain, Linne and Hartman (1986) also show that the most common type portrayed in the television shows at this time was the nuclear family. This began to change in the 1990s with a wider variety of families portrayed on television.

Whilst there has been a recognition that there are alternatives to the nuclear family, looking beyond television, Chambers (2000: 200) argues that ‘three key constellations of familial meanings can be detected in popular media and public discourses’. The first familial meaning is constructed around the ‘ideal’ type of family as a nuclear, white, heterosexual unit which is taken as normal and universal. The second addresses the family as a dysfunctional unit, mostly seen in horror and crime films, television dramas, which frame ‘individuals within defective familial relations or revel in exposing the steamy, explosive and scandalous violations of family morality and sexual betrayal’ (Chambers, 2000: 200). In the third category, we find families made of individuals with various identities, in contrast to the biological, heterosexual, white ideal family, although this category is implicitly ‘committed to the transformation of all social relationships into familial ones’ (Chambers, 2000: 200). One can argue that the three categories of familial representations also apply to Turkish television, despite the fact that it is difficult to see alternative familial formations on Turkish television. After discussing the main trends of familial representations on television, I shall focus on the *Lost City*, a series exploring different forms of the family and which might be seen to fall into the third category described by Chambers.

Between the neighbourhood and fatherhood: conservative constructions of the family in Turkish television dramas

The term ‘family drama’ on Turkish television corresponds to a diversity which is characterized by various tendencies and representations encompassing families led by an authoritarian father (*Father's Home/Baba Evi* 1997-2001), the struggle of single women with her children (*Zerda* 2002-2004, *Aliye* 2004-2006), and so on. Along with this diversity, most of the television families are placed within a particular neighbourhood culture.

Behar and Duben (2002) point out how neighbourhoods were divided according to ethnic lines during the Ottoman rule. This configuration of neighbourhood settlements changed particularly after the Second World War, although socio-economic stratification had begun with the First World War. Whilst the population, settlement, and social characteristics of neighbourhoods has very much changed since then, the representations on television evoke a nostalgic look back to an idealized past assuming neighbourhoods as ‘communities with a certain degree of autonomous control over their day-to-day affairs and a degree of communal solidarity, with a myriad of informal mechanisms for monitoring and regulating public morality’ (Duben and Behar, 2002: 30). In this regard, neighbours and neighbourhoods in TV dramas provide a social setting for TV families, situate them within the broader picture of community, and help to make concrete the abstract concept of ‘society’ in the drama. For instance in *Super Dad* (*Super Baba*, 1993-1997) and *Father’s Home*, which introduce controversial representations of fatherhood, a contrast between the caring and loving father of *Super Dad* with the controlling and stubborn father of *Father’s Home*, the family in each case is surrounded by a lively neighbourhood life in the town centre.

There are two significant examples that construct neighbourhood as a big family: *Sister Perihan* (*Perihan Abı*, 1986-1988) and *Ours* (*Bizimkiler*, 1989-2002), both of which are considered as classics of Turkish television culture and set the narrative framework for their successors. Shot in the Kuzguncuk neighbourhood of Istanbul, *Sister Perihan* involves the story of a woman, Perihan, who takes care of her two siblings after the death of her parents, and the relationship with her loyal lover Şakir who desperately wants to marry her. *Sister Perihan* portrays the ideal of a warm and integrated neighbourhood culture. It features the local shop owners, such as the grocer Osman and butcher Cavit, a male-only coffee shop that is portrayed as the heart of neighbourhood life, and the motherly Perihan receiving frequent visits from her gossipy neighbour Merakli Melahat. On the other hand, another Turkish

television classic, *Ours*, suggests a different form of neighbourliness in a high-rise block where the middle-class Basaran family with two children lives. An alcoholic, a cock fighter, an over-controlling building manager (who is elected from among the residents), an Almanci (Turkish immigrant returned from Germany), and a porter of the building make up the Basaran family's neighbours. The spatial geography of the neighbourhood is reduced to a single ordinary building in *Ours*, a building which it can be imagined is located in any town in Turkey, implicitly breaking the monopoly of Istanbul as the setting for family dramas and thus appealing to urban audience of other cities.

Regarding American television of the fifties, Spiegel (1992: 129) denotes that the medium 'provided an illusion of the ideal neighborhood – the way it was supposed to be'. Similarly, Turkish television dramas depicted an ideal neighbourhood usually identified by 'organic solidarity' in which each member carries out a particular role within the neighbourhood community. A key figure in such series is the tattler of the neighbourhood, a woman who gossips and carries information about neighbourhood persons and events, and unintentionally stirs up trouble while warning members about the potential problems awaiting them. She can be found in the character of Merakli Melahat in *Sister Perihan*, and appears as Muzevir Muzeyyen in the series *Chiefs of Neighbourhood* (*Mahallenin Muhtarlari*, 1992-2002) which takes place in Maltepe, Istanbul – the name Muzevir Muzeyyen, refers to the Turkish idiom for the cultural stereotype of a gossiping woman. Despite her gossiping she is tolerated by the other members of the community who are aware that she means no real harm in disseminating recent news about neighbourhood life. Characters such as the neighbourhood butcher, grocer, coffee shop owner, and greengrocer not only provide goods and services for the area, but also play a role in the construction of the community culture of the neighbourhood. The organic solidarity is complemented by a particular history that shapes the identity of the

neighbourhood, usually conveyed by local shop owners who pass it on to new generations and new residents through the stories they tell.

Neighbourhoods in television dramas are mostly represented with detached or semi-detached houses and a small town centre with local shops (an exception being the tower block of *Ours* which itself provides the neighbourhood locale). Local shops operate as a meeting point for the residents in which recent news about life in the neighbourhood is shared and circulated. In this regard, shops such as the bakers, hairdressers, butchers and grocers are the places in which social interaction among the community members are generated. In *Second Spring* (*İkinci Bahar*, 1998-2001), which until recently had been re-broadcasted several times on different television channels due to its significant popularity, Ali Haydar's kebab shop operates as a meeting place for the residents of the Samatya neighbourhood. But neighbourliness does not only refer to sharing a spatial allocation, it also comprises a common set of social relations that regulate the residents' lives. In this sense sharing a neighbourhood means that the residents are bounded by a common set of moral rules and manners, such as, for example, those involving the honour of women which must be respected and protected for the sake of the neighbourhood. Hence, the neighbourhood operates as a means of control for the privacy of the characters, particularly the female characters, and a moral reference point for the values of the community. When the mother of the Somuncu family, Ayhan, in *Bread and Butter* (*Ekmek Teknesi*, 2002-2005) finds out that one of her daughters, Songul, has a Chinese boyfriend and plans soon to marry him, she finds her daughter's decision unacceptable both because she is to marry a foreigner and because she has taken the decision to marry without asking her parents' permission. Ayhan threatens Songul, and her other daughters and the son, shouting to them: 'Do you never think that there are neighbours, there are acquaintances, there is Allah?!' In these dramas, neighbours keep an eye on the clothing, attitude and social relations of female characters and usually an elderly female neighbour

keeps an eye at the window or the balcony to check the comings and goings within the neighbourhood or the behaviour of the residents on the street or in the town centre. Exceptionally in *Ours*, it is the alcoholic Cemil who spends his time drinking by the window, informing the residents about the movement in the building by pretending to tell his wife who is inside the apartment about what is going on but in a loud enough voice that the neighbours can hear. Neighbourhood surveillance is conducted by particular characters and eventually the 'deviant' is pressurized to conform by the entire neighbourhood community for the sake of the 'collective good'. The whole family, and not just the woman, is often under threat of exclusion from the neighbourhood when the woman's attitude is found to be unacceptable in terms of the moral values of the community. 'Neighbourhood pressure' is the price that individuals and their families have to pay when they violate the social conventions of the neighbourhood. In this regard, neighbourhood culture protects conservative family values at the expense of individual freedom and privacy.

In a way similar to the social surveillance of neighbourhood, the father in these family dramas usually stands as the protector of the family and its conservative values. The difference between the preferences and life-style of the children, on the one hand, and the father, on the other, usually serve as the main source of conflict in most family dramas, as well as some sitcoms. While the father is an embodiment of patriarchal conservative norms in the way he attempts to control the lives of his children, particularly the lives of his daughters, his children rebel against them or suffer from their father's authoritarian attitude. The character of Bilge in *Father's Home*, who has been removed from school by her father because she has a boyfriend, resists her father's control by finding a way to register for a course that prepares her for the university entrance exams. The father Mahmut is portrayed as an intolerant dominant man who abuses his wife and two daughters, and eventually his wife abandons him when she realizes that Mahmut is cheating on her to start work as a teacher, something she

had to give up when she married him. His daughter Bilge works hard to enter university and chooses to study theatre despite her father's opposition, while her elder sister, Safiye, marries a man of her own choosing. *Father's Home* is exceptional in the way it criticizes the male-centred family structure in which female characters are confined to the domestic sphere. On several occasions, Mahmut and his worldview are described as 'out-dated' by other characters, and most of the female characters work outside the home and challenge the male domination in their families. Nevertheless, eventually Mahmut gains acceptance by his family when he learns to respect his wife's and children's preferences and is re-established as the leader of the family. The final programme of *Father's Home* suggests that modern fatherhood is a way of achieving reconciliation with the female characters who struggle with the male-domination in the household.

Despite the questioning characters of *Father's Home*, the daughters of the Tekin family in *The Falling Leaves* (*Yaprak Dokumu*, 2006-2010) deal with various troubles when they violate the boundaries drawn by their father. Adapted from the novel by Resat Nuri Guntekin, written in the early Republican period, *The Falling Leaves* over-dramatizes the challenge posed to the authority of the father by modernity. As in the sit-coms *Fathers are Last to Hear* (*En Son Babalar Duyar*, 2002-2006), and *Children Must Not Hear* (*Cocuklar Duymasin*, 2002-), the mother of the Tekin family spends much effort in covering up her children's misdeeds, mediating between the father and children, and dealing with the father's intolerance, while the father, Ali Riza Bey, experiences a loss of power day by day. Instead of the fear that Mahmut ingrains into his children in *Father's Home*, the children of Ali Riza suffer from strong feelings of guilt and conscience. However, their aspiration to a modern and luxurious life-style ends up splitting the family apart which is destroyed further by the 'femme fatale' daughter-in-law married to Ali Riza's only son. Both in *Father's Home* and *The Falling Leaves*, the father's authority and leadership is challenged by the values and opportunities of

modernity. But while Mahmut in *Father's Home* gradually accommodates to these modern values, Ali Riza in *The Falling Leaves* experiences modernity as the collapse of his paternal authority and the breakdown of his family.

An exceptional representation of fatherhood can be found in the drama *Super Dad* (1993-1997). It stands out from others with the character of the father Fikret, a divorced middle-aged man taking care of his three children, as single fatherhood is very rarely found in contemporary Turkey. Unlike *Father's Home* and *The Falling Leaves*, Fikret is portrayed as an insightful, altruistic and loving father who is able to build a friendly relationship with his children. His life is surrounded by the local people of his neighbourhood, most of whom are friends of Fikret or have known him for a long time. The coffee shop, the owner of which is Fikret's best friend, is also a central place in the social network that constitutes the neighbourhood of *Super Dad*. Fikret and his family are supported by the warm and caring relations they have within the neighbourhood along with the amusing everyday disputes they have with some of the residents such as their landlady.

Looking at these three dramas, in which fatherhood occupies the central position, one can track the gradually increasing conservative tendency in the representation of families since the mid-1990s onwards. Fikret's understanding, liberal approach towards his children is succeeded by the oppressive, uncompromising fatherhood of Mahmut in *Father's Home*, which is opposed and transformed by the women of the family. Most recently in *The Falling Leaves*, Tekin's children are swept into their own catastrophes as they move away from the familial values as set by their father, Ali Riza. Despite their differences, the popularity and longevity of these dramas indicate a continuity in the importance of the role of the father in the making of television families.

‘At least the kid can have a sweet home’: a novel conception of family?

Lost City is considered an alternative to the conventional dramas framed by the idealization of the family and a conservative neighbourhood culture because of its exceptional discourse on family and identity which gave voice to underrepresented groups such as the lower classes, transgender people and immigrants. It was aired on a leading private TV channel, Kanal D, on 24 September 2012 and lasted for 26 episodes until its sudden end on 25 March 2013. Unlike its counterparts, the ninety minute-long drama was not always broadcast at the same time each week but occupied different time slots on different days which, according to Gunebakan (2013), served to disadvantage the programme even though it appealed to a significant audience. *Lost City*'s unexpected end led many to regard the changes in its broadcasting slot as a plot to end the drama which had received high ratings (Gunebakan, 2013).

Lost City begins with the migration of the Toptas family from a village in the Black Sea region of Turkey to Istanbul. The eldest son of the family already works in Istanbul and welcomes the family, consisting of a grandfather, mother and five other children of different ages, to his flat which is located in a deprived area of central Istanbul, Tarlabasi. The area is host to the lower and under-class of Istanbul, especially those working in the shops and cafes of the Beyoglu district. In recent years, the neighbourhood has been subject to the policies of ‘urban transformation’¹ which entail the gentrification of the area and the displacement of the residents supposedly moving them to better housing. As newcomers to Tarlabasi, the Toptas family is characterized by warm and close relationship among its members, showing respect to the elderly and obedience to the mother, Meryem, who runs the household and its economy and regulates the social interaction between her children. However, this supportive relationship within the family will be challenged by the penetration of ‘others’ into the family.

¹ See Celik, 2011 and Lovering and Turkmen, 2011 for detailed analyses of urban transformation.

The unity of the family is the main theme of *Lost City* as with many other such series on Turkish television. According to Arslan (2005: 51), in the Turkish melodramas of 1960s the family appears as a metaphor of the nation, the unity of which is supposedly threatened by other countries and by Westernization. One can argue that television dramas inherited this representation regime in which the family metaphorically replaces the nation, framed as it is by the conventions of the television narrative: a complex plot which is characterized by a complex inter-connection between various characters; the diversity of the challenges and contradictions these characters face; the episodic style that leaves the audience with a cliff-hanger at the end of episodes; and so on. Thus, the unity of the Toptas family is under attack from the cosmopolitan culture of the city, in the same way that globalization challenges the Turkish nation with the problems of the rediscovery of ethnic identities. Nevertheless, the narrative of *Lost City* exceptionally suggests reconciliation with ‘others’ rather than the elimination of differences, thereby expanding the borders of the family, the nation, and us towards the excluded, subordinated and otherized. The serial pursues the possibilities of living together and keeping the family together while the characters and their life conditions change as encounters with ‘others’ occur and new emotional bonds are established.

In *Lost City* the family feels uncomfortable from the very first day of their move because of the diverse culture of the city, something with which they are unfamiliar. The challenge presented to them by this multi-cultural social sphere is symbolized through the noise of the street that comes in through the open (and closed) windows of the house. The family members experience the rhythm of the city through the voices that penetrate into their privacy almost as if they were living outside in the street, although the sound of the street vanishes after a few episodes as the family begins to come to terms with the urban culture reflecting their socialising with the ‘outside world’. When the family members hear the frequent sirens on the street, see police chasing young men, they feel alienated and lonely. The first encounter with

their neighbour in the upper flat, the flamboyantly dressed and drunk Aysel, who tries to get into the Toptas flat by mistake, expresses the height of their shock. This encounter is seen to threaten the 'honour'² of the woman in the family leading Meryem, the mother, to shout to her son Ismail: 'Son, to what kind of place did you bring your mother and sister?!'

Lost City is also distinguished from other television serials in terms of the diversity of political issues that it depicts. Rather than conveying explicit political messages or painting a fantasy-world free of social problems, the drama provides a realistic perspective on various social issues such as incest, the murder of women³, violence against transgender people, illegal migrants, poverty and the Kurdish question with each providing a setting for the background of the characters. Furthermore, it provides an historical account of the violence against Greek residents in Turkey, drawing on the memories of an elderly character, Ismail Dede, the grandfather of the Toptas family. As revealed through flashbacks, in 1955 Ismail Dede loots a jewellery shop during the 6-7 September Attack⁴ supported by the state against Greek residents of Istanbul and loses contact with his Greek first love. Feeling guilty about these misdeeds, he searches for the owner of the jewellery shop in order to return the necklace

² The cultural definition of honour/*namus* refers to the patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality. *Namus* is a type of sexual honour that presupposes that women have certain physical and moral qualities (Sev'er and Yurdakul, 1999: 8). In her seminal anthropological work, Germaine Tillion (2006) argues that 'honour' is a historical value which is specific to a geographical area that she calls the 'Mediterranean region', stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Himalayas. Wearing white trousers or a mini skirt or talking to a male stranger can be considered to be a loss of *namus*, depending on the socio-cultural background of the men involved. The loss of *namus* can be punished by the woman being killed by her husband, father, brother or other male relatives.

³ Male violence against women and the murder of women in particular is a burning issue in Turkey. The Stop the Murder of Women Platform stated that two hundred and ninety four women were murdered by men in 2014.

⁴ In the context of the rising tension between the Turkish and Greek governments over Cyprus, Turkish nationalists organized an attack against the Greek minority in 1955 in Istanbul. Even though different parties were involved in the assault, the role of the Turkish media in facilitating the anger against Greeks was significant. The false news released about the bombing of Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki which was announced through radio and newspapers triggered the attacks upon the Greek minority living in Istanbul. Thousands of houses and shops occupied by Greek citizens were looted, churches were burned and more than ten people were killed and hundreds were injured during these events.

that he has kept all these years. He finds out that the jeweller had died, donates the jewellery to a church and finds his first love, Eleni, who decide to re-unite. Coming to terms with his misdeeds, Ismail Dede indicates a way of reconciling the past of the 'nation', in contrast to an aggressive Turkish identity that has been promoted by official discourses.

Contrary to the usual patriarchal order in television dramas in which the grandfather resumes the leadership of the family in the father's absence, Ismail Dede only occupies a symbolic position as the head of the family. Instead of Ismail Dede, the mother, Meryem, takes over the leadership of the family. She gradually experiences the burden of being a single mother after their move to Istanbul and adopts an authoritarian protectionist attitude towards her children, controlling the time they spend outside and their relationships with friends. Her children react by calling her the 'sergeant' and oppose her in different ways.

Meryem's protectionist attitude goes so far that she reports the lover of her daughter, Seher, who is a Black illegal immigrant⁵, to the police when she finds out about their relationship. This leads to the police shooting him dead. When Seher realizes that her lover Daniel has been shot because of her mother's actions, she leaves home and refuses to talk with Meryem. Seher rebels not only against Meryem, but also against the racism surrounding her relationship with Daniel, the discrimination against migrants, and the discrimination against women expressed in the way her brothers try to control her life, criticize her relationship and try to force her to end it. Seher keeps questioning her brothers' privileged position whilst her life is under patriarchal restrictions. Arguing with her elder brother Irfan, Seher screams: 'All rights are granted to you, aren't they?! You're born right brother, aren't you?!' Unlike the

⁵ *Arap Baci/Baci Kalfa* (Arab Sister/Sister Forewoman) has been the only black character in Turkish television dramas, imported from Turkish cinema. The character appeared in the family drama *Ugurlugiller* in late 1980s and is played by a cross-dressing white male actor, Tevfik Gelenbe. In Turkey, the word 'Arab' is employed in a broad sense to refer to someone who is 'Black'. Douglas (2003: 142) notes that 'black characters were presented not only in service of middle-class, White families but, at the same time, absent from any apparent personal family relations' in American television until 1980s. One can argue that working as a servant devoting her life to Ugurlugil family, *Arap Baci* follows the pattern seen on American television.

character Songul in *Bread and Butter*, who complies with her mother's wishes to leave her foreign boyfriend, Seher defends her relationship with Daniel and, despite her loss but through her determination, she is finally reconciled with her family including her mother. Seher refuses when her mother and brothers insist that she come back home, as she aims to 'stand on her own two feet', find a job and a place to live and be successful. She does not return to her 'sweet home', even after she is reconciled with her family:

Mum, I left home because I was angry at you, this is true. But now, the reason I leave is not to punish you. I've learned how to stand on my own feet from you. I've made a life of my own now. Actually, I apply what I've learned from you, I do nothing else. Let me leave and prove myself that I'm your daughter and need no one.

As with other female characters in the series, the Toptas women are portrayed as strong, independent and determined, and the women's resistance against patriarchal norms and values is a dominant theme in *Lost City*. The Toptas' neighbour Aysel, a sex worker, is portrayed as a strong and independent women struggling with her obsessed lover Ethem while getting closer to one of Meryem's sons, Irfan, who wants to become a footballer despite his mother's opposition. Aysel was sexually abused by her uncle when she was adopted by him after the death of her parents in a car accident. She fell in love with Ethem when she was a teenager, however she leaves him after he cheats on her and she starts working as a prostitute. The serial bravely raises the incest issue, a social taboo, rarely depicted in TV fictions in Turkey. On the other hand, another neighbour, the dry-cleaner Zehra works hard to contribute to the income of her family, while her brother, Murat, pressurizes her to enter into an arranged marriage with his boss where he works as a car mechanic. Nevertheless, Zehra's father, Selahattin, supports his daughter against Murat, in spite of having to deal with his own crisis of masculinity because of losing his job along with his bread-winner position within the family. As the Zehra's family is Kurdish, in this regard, *Lost City* reverses the dominant

representation regime in which Kurdish men are associated with male-domination because of their ‘backwardness’.

Unlike other television dramas, in *Lost City* Tarlabasi is portrayed as a cosmopolitan neighbourhood with a variety of life styles and different identities. Instead of the homogenous neighbourhood culture usually found in television dramas, one that is framed by common norms and values, residents of Tarlabasi primarily share a common economic background of poverty, low-paid and insecure jobs, or unemployment. In this sense, the concept of neighbourhood in *Lost City* is constructed through a struggle for life, instead of affluence and conformity. The neighbourhood operates as an economic network by which the residents help each other in finding jobs, setting up a home or lending money: Zehra’s mother Elmas gives a reference for Meryem in the restaurant where she works; Aysel employs Elmas in her bar when she quits her job; and the Toptas boy, Sadik, finds money for surgery from his friend Emre.

Despite raising questions about the family as a social institution, *Lost City* has been criticized for normalizing the most rebellious character Aysel, the sex worker, who believes in neither family nor marriage, and re-affirming the heterosexual nuclear form of family (Gunacti and Sarigul, 2013) After Nurdan, a woman who had been sheltering in Aysel’s house (to help out the association that Seher works for and who are protecting Nurdan from marital violence), is murdered by her husband, Aysel looks after their daughter Cilem and becomes emotionally attached to her. Aysel and Irfan decide to take care of Cilem for a while, before handing her to social services, in order to protect the child from her runaway father. After Cilem’s father is arrested, Aysel wants to adopt Cilem who is an illegal immigrant, saying ‘at least the kid can have a sweet home’, while Irfan suggests that he be registered as her father. Convinced of Irfan’s sense of responsibility and touched by the bond that Irfan and she have established with Cilem, Aysel takes the exceptional decision to marry Irfan. *Lost City* does not reject the

family as a social unity but rather questions the notion of family homogeneity and that the family has to be made up of people of similar backgrounds. The drama ask the viewer to reconsider membership of ‘the family’ as something beyond similarities of race, class, ethnicity, and the bond of blood.

Conclusion

The drama boom in Turkish television after the 2000s, along with the rising public discussion about the political agenda with regard to coup-d’états, Islamic identities and the Kurdish question, facilitated the development of overtly politicized discourses on various issues regarding past and present identities within Turkey (Emre Cetin, 2014). Following those on news media and journalists, the implicit and explicit forms of government intervention to television dramas has resulted in ‘politicization’ in themes and discourses of the dramas during the late 2000s (Emre Cetin, 2014). Despite the dominance of hegemonic political perspectives on television, alternative voices, albeit short-lived, could be heard. *Lost City* is distinguished from other dramas in terms of its challenge to traditional understandings of the family on television.

The representation of the family in *Lost City*, with its different framework, plays a constructive role towards an acknowledgement of broader social issues such as sexuality, gender, and race. It has revised the televisual families that only consist of members from similar backgrounds and has invited excluded identities into the ‘sweet home’ of the Turkish family. The good boy of the Toptas family, Irfan, finds himself helping out Duygu, a transgender sex worker, who is brutally attacked by ‘unknown assailants’ very early on after his move to Istanbul. The violence against transgender people, a contemporary issue in Turkey that has broadly been ignored, is raised in *Lost City* from a critical perspective. The

fact that a transgender character is played by a transgender actress contributed a great deal to the visibility of, and gave voice to, transgender identities in Turkey.

Lost City's characters use the term 'racism' and unequivocally stand against it. Furthermore the problems of immigrants are revealed in the drama as it draws attention to the absence of any state migration policy, particularly for African immigrants for whom Turkey is often a transit country. Police violence against illegal migrants is brought onto the agenda reminding us of the case of Festus Okey, an undocumented Nigerian immigrant, who was tortured and killed whilst in police custody in 2007. *Lost City* supports the legitimacy of political activism on a number of burning issues as, for example, when Seher starts actively working for a non-governmental organization for immigrants after the death of Daniel.

As in *Father's Home*, the female characters of *Lost City* are given agency despite the male pressure they have to confront. However, unlike *Father's Home*, the Toptas family is led by the mother who sets the rules for her family. *Lost City* addresses male violence against women as a political issue and underlines the significance of women's solidarity for the protection and survival of women as, for example, when Aysel and Seher support Cilem's mother in helping to hide her from her husband. Whilst acknowledging the feminist criticisms of what might be seen in Aysel's compromise towards acceptance of family life in the finale of *Lost City*, one can still argue that what Aysel offers Irfan is companionship between a prostitute and an orphan child, the latter a man who has defied his own family in order to make a family with the 'unwanted', something very different from the ideal marriage that Turkish audience are used to watching on television. Aysel's transformation from someone who shouts at Irfan when he is trying to correctly lay the breakfast table for her in her house: 'Bro, do you think that this is your mother's sweet home?', to the person who announces to Irfan in the final episode that she wants to be the new mother of Cilem and says: 'If she is not

registered, then I will adopt her. We make our own way. At least, the kid can have a sweet home', invites the audience to imagine the family as a very different life.

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